

Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Volumes 58-60* (Bellingham: Logos Bible Software), 2013.

There can be no doubt that the works of Martin Luther have been, are, and will, apparently, always be of great use to Christian theologians and readers. These new volumes contain some of Luther's sermons (vol. 58) and Prefaces (vols. 59-60).

Susan Boettcher opines

Awaited for decades by students, pastors, and scholars alike, the new volumes of *Luther's Works* are being prepared by the most qualified experts of our generation. They provide a significant addition to Luther's homiletical, polemical, exegetical, and occasional works in English translation. The product is not only painstakingly accurate, and historically, linguistically, and theologically responsible, but also eminently readable and accessible to a wide variety of audiences. The broader information offered here drastically expands the utility of the older volumes. This work belongs in every academic and parish library.

—Susan R. Boettcher, Department of History, University of Texas at Austin

She is not incorrect in anything she writes— but who could write too much or too effusively or too glowingly or too appreciatively of Luther's writings?

In point of fact, attempting to 'review' the work of Luther is a little bit like trying to review the Universe. Or a bit like trying to catalog all the wonders of the sea or all the beauties of

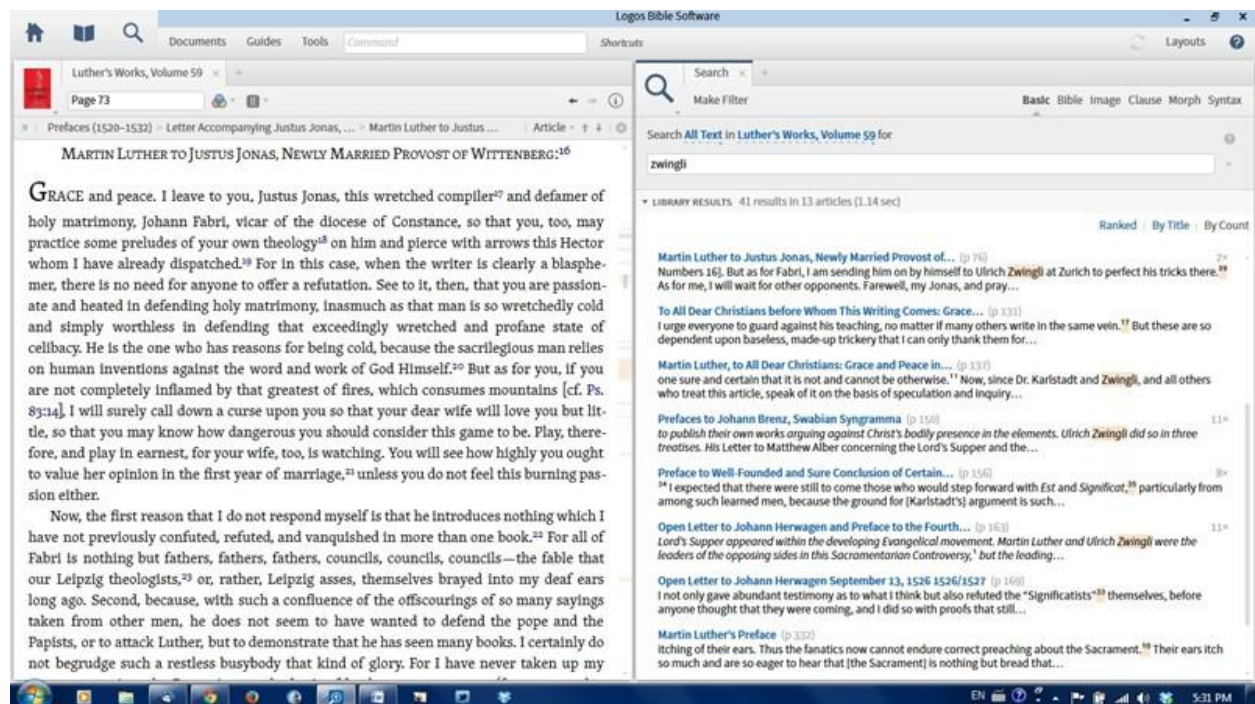
the forest or all the insects of the field. One cannot properly survey the Himalaya that are the works and words of Luther in less than 60 volumes.

Nonetheless, it is worth taking the time to remind readers or introduce new students to the usefulness of these new volumes, brilliant additions to the 55 volume edition in English of Luther's writings. And, allow me to add, one need not agree with Luther on every point (he was, after all, frequently wrong and he was, it's fair to say, neither as brilliant as Zwingli nor as wise as Calvin) to appreciate his important contributions to the development and explication of Christian thought.

He was a giant and no one who wants to call himself or herself a theologian can go around him or ignore him. One must go through him. It cannot be helped.

The value of the present electronic edition published by the good people at Logos is the ease with which one can do searches and find the précised materials one seeks (assuming one knows enough to use the right search terms).

For instance, if one wants to know what Luther says about Zwingli in the Prefaces, one need merely search those volumes. And if one does, here is what one finds:



Clicking on any of the references results in the page in question appearing. Here's a snippet:

Now the heresy of the Anabaptists is so powerfully refuted in this little book by Herr Justus Menius, in addition to what he and others have previously

written against it, that (as I have already said) if a cow had the use of reason, it would have to say, “This was the truth indeed, and could not be otherwise.” Moreover, this is good, pure German, so no one can claim that things have not been explained clearly and understandably enough—seeing that [the Anabaptists] and the enemies of the Sacrament speak German so deplorably that not only their theology but also their language cannot readily be understood. For in our age God has appointed matters in such a way that the devil is prevented from speaking good German; that is how Karlstadt and Zwingli had to talk, so that it cost me much labor to understand what they were saying.<sup>1</sup>

The Prefaces, like the infamous ‘Table Talk’, open windows on Luther’s views in a way which surpasses what we know of most other theologians (unless we have a lot of their private correspondence). Luther was simply unafraid to speak his mind. About anything. And for Luther, everything was theology and theology was everything. That fact spews, virtually, from every line he wrote.

The sermons, too, are a source – a veritable storehouse – of Luther’s views. Those views, at times, are quite troubling. Luther, as one and all will know, was somewhat uncharitable towards the Jews (to put it mildly). But to be sure, no one, anywhere, should offer an opinion on the subject of Luther’s views on the Jews without reading Gritsch.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the sermons in the collection include

#### Four Sermons in Eisleben (1546)

Johann Aurifaber’s Preface

*Translated by Christopher Boyd Brown*

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany, Matt. 8:23–27, January 31, 1546

*Translated by Adam Francisco*

Sermon for the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, Luke 2:22–32, February 2, 1546

*Translated by Kevin Walker*

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, Matt. 13:24–30, February 7, 1546

*Translated by Kevin Walker*

Admonition against the Jews

*Translated by Kevin Walker*

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<sup>1</sup> Luther, M. (2011). Preface to Justus Menius, on the Spirit of the Anabaptists: 1544. In C. B. Brown (Ed.), C. C. Tiews (Trans.), *Luther’s Works* (Vol. 60, pp. 333–334). Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cerdmans.com/Products/6676/martin-luthers-antisemitism.aspx>

In his 'Admonition Against Jews', Luther writes

Now that I have been here and preached to you for a while, it is time for me to go home and perhaps never preach to you again. Therefore, I want to leave you with this blessing and prayer: that you remain diligent in the Word of God's grace that your preachers and pastors faithfully teach you, and that you may become accustomed to praying God to protect you from all the wise and prudent ones [Matt. 11:25] who despise the doctrine of the Gospel, for they have often done much harm and would like to do still more.

More than others, you still have Jews in your land who do great harm. Now, we want to deal with them in a Christian manner and, in the first place, to offer them the Christian faith, so that they will receive the Messiah, who is after all their kinsman, born of their flesh and blood, and the true seed of Abraham, of whom they boast. I am afraid, however, that Jewish blood has now become more diluted and impure. You should first invite them to turn to the Messiah and be baptized so that people can see that they are serious. If not, we will not tolerate them, for Christ has commanded us to be baptized and believe in Him. Although we are not yet able to believe as strongly as we ought, nevertheless God bears with us patiently.

Now, the way things stand with the Jews is this: that they daily blaspheme and slander our Lord Jesus Christ. Since they do this, and we know about it, we should not tolerate it. For if I tolerate in my midst someone who slanders, blasphemes, and curses my Lord Christ, then I make myself a participant in the sins of another [1 Tim. 5:22]. But if I already have enough sins of my own, then you lords should not tolerate them but drive them away. If, however, they convert, give up usury, and receive Christ, then we will gladly regard them as our brothers.<sup>3</sup>

He shouldn't have said such things, but he did. And they must be dealt with, confronted, and fought. But why should we? Because the one thing we can all learn, and agree upon, is the fact that theology has implications that reach far beyond the confines of the lecture hall or the church walls.

No one in the history of Christianity apart from Jesus and the Apostles has taught us that lesson better than Luther. Not even Calvin. Not even Zwingli.

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<sup>3</sup> Luther, M. (2010). The Third Sermon: For the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany the Gospel, Matthew 13 [:24–30]. In C. B. Brown (Ed.), K. Walker (Trans.), *Luther's Works: Sermons V* (Vol. 58, p. 458). Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

It is, certainly, unnecessary for me to urge readers to lay hands on these books. People no more need to be told to do that than they need to be told to breath.

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